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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the first two months of operation of the OCLC interlibrary loan system, an online system designed to increase speed and effectiveness in obtaining interlibrary loans. This system provides (1) bibliographic verification of interlibrary loan records and location of materials by using online union catalog records, (2) automatic transmission of interlibrary loan requests and resulting responses, (3) automatic forwarding of interlibrary loan requests to potential lenders, (4) immediate access to interlibrary loan records via several access points, and (5) automatic updating of interlibrary loan record status. (JEG)

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DESCRIPTION OF A COMPUTERIZED, ON-LINE INTERLIBRARY LOAN SYSTEM

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Since the presentation at previous IFLA meetings of two papers describing increased availability of resources effected by OCLC's on-line union catalog (1,2), OCLC has put into operation in the United States a nationwide, computerized, on-line system for interlibrary lending designed to increase speed and effectiveness in obtaining interlibrary loans. The present paper reports on the first two months of operation of the new system. It is believed that the OCLC on-line Interlibrary Loan Subsystem is the first of its kind, and in a sense, this paper supplements the report that Maurice B. Line gave at the 1978 IFLA Congress (3).

OCLC is a not-for-profit corporation having a governance structure that combines benefits of a tightly held not-for-profit corporation and of a network cooperative with its salient features being a 15-member Board of Trustees and a Users Council of nearly seventy members that elect from their own group six of the 15 Trustees. The Board of Trustees has the powers and duties required for governance of a corporation. The purpose of the Users Council is to give libraries participating in the OCLC computerized, on-line system an institutionalized role particularly in establishment of policy.

OCLC's purpose is to promote the evolution of library use, of libraries themselves, and of librarianship. Long-range goals are: 1) to increase availability of library resources to library patrons; 2) to lower the rate of rise of library per-unit costs; 3) to furnish patrons and library staff with information when and where they need it; 4) to enable patrons to receive personalized service; and 5) to provide management information. The new Interlibrary Loan (ILL) Subsystem succeeds in increasing availability of resources to library patrons as well as providing a less costly and more efficient procedure than classical manual techniques for negotiating interlibrary loans.

In June 1979 there were more than eighteen hundred libraries participating in the OCLC on-line system of which some fourteen hundred possessed one or more specially designed OCLC cathode ray tube terminals connected via multiple-party telephone circuits to OCLC's computer system in Columbus, Ohio; there were more than twenty-six hundred OCLC CRT terminals operating in June 1979. In addition there were an undetermined number of asynchronous terminals in more than four hundred organizations authorized to use the OCLC system via direct dial-up telephone communications

or the TYMNET Network that is becoming increasingly available outside the United States.

Over one hundred thousand miles of dedicated telephone circuitry connect the twenty-six hundred terminals to OCLC's central computer installation in Columbus. Here, OCLC maintains eight large computers, three medium-sized computers and thirty-odd small computers. The disk memory units containing the on-line catalog have a nominal capacity of 6,000,000,000 characters.

In June 1979 the on-line union catalog contained slightly more than five million entries to which were attached some forty-five million location listings.

Currently, OCLC operates on-line the ILL Subsystem, a Serials Control Subsystem, and a Shared Cataloging and Union Catalog Subsystem, which has been its principal activity since 1971. OCLC requires that each participating library in the OCLC system do all its cataloging in Roman alphabets on the system; OCLC is basically a cooperative activity and this requirement is an expression of cooperation. The eighteen hundred participants catalog 94 percent of their new items using cataloging information already in

the OCLC on-line catalog and input the other six percent in the form of new records to be available for other participants to use. In June 1979 participating libraries were cataloging on-line upwards of three hundred thousand books each week for which OCLC was producing more than two million catalog cards. The Cataloging Subsystem automatically records in the on-line union catalog a library as processing an item when the library catalogs the item. In addition, OCLC produces cataloging records on magnetic tape from which many participating libraries make COM catalogs.

The ILL Subsystem processes an interlibrary loan request using information extracted from a bibliographic record in the on-line union catalog or bibliographic information supplied by the requestor when there is no bibliographic record in the on-line catalog. The ILL Subsystem processes requests for all types of material including periodical articles and photocopies. (4).

As is the case with other OCLC on-line subsystems, the ILL Subsystem is based on the on-line union catalog, but it also has a Transaction File containing an up-to-date record of each loan and a Message-Waiting File containing

individual messages concerning the status of interlibrary loan transactions. These messages may be requests, responses, renewals, or recalls produced automatically as the system monitors activity.

To initiate an interlibrary loan, a terminal operator requests a workform from the system. If there is a catalog record having location listings in the union catalog for the item desired, the system will automatically extract necessary bibliographic information from that catalog record and place it in the workform. Next, the terminal operator furnishes pertinent data and selects up to five holding libraries to which the request is to go. The subsystem has an automatic referral device that forwards an interlibrary loan request to each of five potential lenders in turn until the request is filled. The system automatically forwards the request to the next specified potential lender as soon as it receives a negative response from the potential lender being queried or after a lapse of four days with there being no response.

A major, computerized, on-line activity such as the ILL Subsystem is a highly complex, technical system that achieves time and cost benefits for libraries, but usually contains in its initial phases opportunities for improvement. OCLC has requested participating libraries to make suggestions and many have been received. There have also been expressions of pleasure particularly concerning the rapid processing of interlibrary loan requests, there being instances when an item has been shipped the same day it was requested. Also, a gratifyingly large number of users have stated that it is fun to use the subsystem.

During the six weeks following May 1, participating libraries increased their use of the ILL Subsystem by more than 60 percent. By mid-June the daily average of requests being processed was approximately seventeen hundred. An analysis of the activity of 34 libraries during a trial period from February 5 to March 31 revealed that of 8,038 requests, 66.0 percent were for monographs, 32.5 percent for periodical articles, with 1.5 percent being for other types of items. An analysis of the sources of bibliographic data for interlibrary loan requests by 37 libraries during the same trial period and excluding requests for periodicals

showed that 79.4 percent employed data from bibliographic records in the on-line union catalog, while 20.6 percent contained original data supplied by the requestor.

In summary, the OCLC Interlibrary Loan Subsystem provides: 1) bibliographic verification of interlibrary loan records and location of materials by using on-line union catalog records; 2) automatic transmission of interlibrary loan requests and resulting responses; 3) automatic forwarding of interlibrary loan requests to potential lenders; 4) immediate access to interlibrary loan records via several access points; and 5) automatic updating of interlibrary loan record status.

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